

# Performer

## Jerzy Grotowski

The Performer, with a capital letter, is a man of action. He is not a man who plays another. He is a dancer, a priest, a warrior: he is outside aesthetic genres. Ritual is performance, an accomplished action, an act. Degenerated ritual is a spectacle. I don't want to discover something new but something forgotten. Something which is so old that all distinctions between aesthetic genres are no longer of use.

I am a *teacher of Performer*. I speak in the singular. A teacher is someone through whom the teaching passes; the teaching should be received, but the manner for the apprentice to rediscover it, *to remember*, is personal. How does the teacher himself come to know the teaching? By initiation, or by theft. Performer is a state of being. A man of knowledge, we can speak of him in reference to Castaneda if we like the romantic color. I prefer to think of Pierre de Combas. Or even of Don Juan as described by Nietzsche: a rebel who should conquer knowledge; even if he is not cursed by others, he feels different, like an outsider. Hindu tradition tells of *vratias* (the rebel hordes). *Vratia* is someone who is on the way to conquer knowledge. A man of knowledge has at his disposal *the doing* and not ideas or theories. The true teacher - what does he do for the apprentice? He says: *do it*. The apprentice fights to understand, to reduce the unknown to the known, to avoid doing. By the very fact that he wants to understand, he resists. He can understand only after he *does it*. He *does it* or not. Knowledge is a matter of doing.

### **danger and chance**

If I use the term: warrior, you can refer it again to Castaneda, but all Scriptures also speak of the warrior. You can find him in the Hindu tradition as well as in the African one. He is somebody who is conscious of his own mortality. If it's necessary to confront corpses, he confronts them, but if it's not necessary to kill, he doesn't kill. Among the Indians of the New World it is said, that between two battles, *the warrior has a tender heart, like a young girl*. To conquer knowledge he fights, because the pulsation of life becomes stronger and more articulated in moments of great intensity, of great danger. Danger and chance go together. There is no real class if not in regard to real danger. In a moment of challenge appears the rhythmization of human impulses. The ritual is a moment of great intensity; provoked intensity; life then becomes rhythmic. Performer knows to link body impulsion to sonority (the stream of life should be articulated in forms). The witnesses then enter into intense states because, as they say, they have felt a presence. And this is owing to Performer, who is a bridge between the witness and something. In this sense, Performer is *pontifex*, a maker of bridges.

Essence: etymologically, it's a question of being, of *be-ing* . Essence interests me because in it nothing is sociological. It is what you did not receive from others, what did not come from outside, what is not learned. For example, conscience is something which belongs to essence; it is different from the moral code which just belongs to society. If you break the moral code you feel guilty, and it is society which speaks in you. But if you do an act against conscience, you feel remorse - this is between you and yourself, and not between you and society. As almost everything that you possess is sociological, essence seems to be a little thing, but it is yours. In the fifties, in Sudan, there were young warriors in the villages Kau. For the warrior with organicity in full, the body and essence can enter into osmosis: it seems impossible to dissociate them. But this is not a permanent state, it lasts only for a short period. In Zeami's words, it's *the flower of youth*. However, with age, it's possible to pass from the *body-and-essence* to the *body of essence*. That is the outcome of a difficult evolution, the personal labor, which in some way is the task of each one. The key question is: what is your process? Are you faithful to or do you fight against your process? The process is something like the destiny of each one, his own destiny, which develops (or: which just unfolds) with time. So: *what is the quality of your submission to your own destiny?* You can catch the process if what you do is in keeping with yourself, if you don't *hate what you do*. The process is linked to essence and virtually leads to the *body of essence*. When the warrior is in the short time of osmosis *body-and-essence*, he should catch his process. When you adjust to the process, the body becomes non-resistant, nearly transparent. Everything is in lightness, in evidence. With Performer, performing can become near process.

## **the I-I**

It can be read in ancient texts: *We are two. The bird who picks and the bird who looks on . The one will die, the one will live.* Busy with picking, drunk with life inside time, we forget to *make live* the part in us which looks on. So, there is the danger to exist only inside time, and in no way outside time. To feel looked upon by this other part of yourself (the part which is, as if it were, outside time) gives another dimension. There is an I-I. The second I is quasi virtual; it is not-in you-the look of the others, nor any judgement; it's like an immobile look: a silent presence, like the sun which illuminates the things - and that's all. The process of each one can be accomplished only in the context of this still presence. I-I: in experience, the couple doesn't appear as separate, but as full, unique.

In the way of Performer - he perceives essence during its osmosis with the body, and then works the process; he develops the I-I. The looking presence of the teacher can sometimes function as a mirror of the connection I-I (this connection is not yet traced).

When the link I-I is traced, the teacher can disappear and Performer continue toward the *body of essence*; that which can be recognized in the photo of Gurdjieff, old, sitting on a

bench in Paris. From the image of the young warrior of Kau to that of Gurdjieff, is the way from the *body-and-essence* to the *body of essence* .

I-I does not mean to be cut in two but to be double. The question is to be passive in action and active in the look (reversing the habit). Passive: to be receptive. Active: to be present. To nourish the life of the I-I, Performer must develop not an organism-mass, an organism of muscles, athletic, but an organism-channel through which the forces circulate.

Performer should work with a precise structure; making efforts, because persistence and respect for details are the rigour which allows him to make present the I-I. The things to be done must be precise. *Don't improvise, please!* It is necessary to find the actions, simple, yet taking care that they are mastered and that they endure. If not, they will be not simple, but banal.

### **what I recall**

One access to the creative way consists of discovering in yourself an ancient corporality to which you are bound by a strong ancestral relation. So you are neither in the character nor in the noncharacter. Starting from details you can discover in you somebody other - your grandfather, your mother. A photo, a memory of wrinkles, the distant echo of a color of the voice enable you to reconstruct a corporality. First, the corporality of somebody known, and then more and more distant, the corporality of the unknown one, the ancestor. Is this corporality literally as it was? Maybe not literally - but yet as it might have been. You can arrive very far back, as if your memory awoke. That is a phenomenon of reminiscence, as if you recall Performer of the primal ritual. Each time I discover something, I have the feeling it is what I recall. Discoveries are behind us and we must journey back to reach them. With the breakthrough - as in the return of an exile - can one touch something which is no longer linked to origins but - if I dare say - to *the origin* ? I believe so. Does essence stay in the background of the memory? I don't know at all. When I work close to essence, I have the impression that memory actualizes. When essence is activated, it is as if very strong potentialities are activated. The reminiscence is perhaps one of these potentialities.

### **the inner man**

I quote: *Between the inner man and the outer man there is the same infinite difference as between the heaven and the earth.*

*When I was in my first cause, I did not have God, I was my own cause. There, nobody asked me to where I tended, nor what I was doing; nobody was there to question me. What I wanted, I was it and what I was, I wanted it; I was free from God and from all things.*

*When I came out (flowed out) all creatures spoke of God. If someone asked me: - Brother Eckhart, when did you come out of the home? -I was still there just a moment ago. I was myself, I wanted me myself and knew me myself, to make the man (which here below I am).*

*This is why I am unborn, and by my mode unborn, I cannot die. What I am by my birth will die and vanish, because it is devolved to time and will decay with time. But in my birth were born also all creatures. They all felt the need to rise from their life to their essence.*

*When I return, this breakthrough is much more noble than my coming out. In the breakthrough - there, I am above all creatures, neither God, nor creature; but I am what I was, what I should remain now and for ever. When I arrive - there, nobody asks me where I come from nor where I have been. There I am what I was, I do not increase nor diminish, because I am - there, an immobile cause, which makes move all things.*

NOTE: One version of this text (based on the conference of Grotowski) was published in May 1987 by ART-PRESS in Paris, with the following note by Georges Banu: <<What I propose here is neither a recording, nor a summary, but notes carefully taken, as close as possible to the formulas of Grotowski. It should be read as indications of a trajectory and not as the terms of a program, nor a document - finished, written, closed. The echoes of the voice of the hermit can arrive to us even if his acts remain secret.>> The sub-titles (except the last: "the inner man") are of the editor of ART-PRESS. The above text has been reworked and extended by Grotowski for the present publication. To identify "Performer" with the participants of the Workcenter would be an abuse of the term. The matter is rather of that case of apprenticeship which, in all the activity of "teacher of Performer" does not occur but rare times.

Original French text translated by Thomas Richards

